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ABSTRACT

This paper describes multiculturalism courses in teacher education at Bethany College (California) and at the University of Southern Mississippi and argues that an increasingly global society creates the need for unity that can be achieved through multicultural education, which if effectively designed and implemented enlightens individuals to the importance of multiple perspectives. The paper discusses reasons why multicultural education is necessary and notes that the majority of individuals training for careers in teaching at Bethany College are females of Euro-American descent. The paper also describes efforts at Bethany College to infuse multicultural awareness and appreciation along with the Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) strategies. In a social studies methods course at the University of Southern Mississippi students read and reacted to two pieces of assigned multicultural literature, met in cooperative groups, and kept reflective dialogue journals. Students also formed pairs to recall and discuss critical incidents in which they had witnessed prejudice or an unkind act directed toward someone because of difference in gender, cultural affiliation, age, or socioeconomic status. Finally, the paper mentions that preservice teachers implemented integrative thematic social studies units that they had developed in culturally diverse classrooms near the university. The paper closes by arguing that future teachers must have a better understanding of other cultures so that they can provide an optimal education for all of their students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, because we live in a culturally diverse society, it is critical that students not only develop an understanding and an appreciation of other cultures, but that they also possess skills that will enable them to function within diverse societies whether at home or abroad. (Contains 30 references.) (JB)

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Multicultural Education: The Key to Global Unity

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Multiculture Education: The Key to Global Unity

Today, more than ever before, there is the need for unity in in our increasingly global society. One way in which to achieve this unity is through education.

Multicultural education, if effectively designed and implemented, enlightens us to the importance of multiple perspectives. It encourages us to respect differences and to welcome the stranger in our midst. It empowers us to relate our historical and contemporary stories and to listen to the voices of others. Most importantly, it enables us to establish a safe world in which we can be who we are and walk within, between and among culturally diverse communities both at home and abroad.

At Bethany College, and at the University of Mississippi (USM) where I previously taught, multicultural education is an ever evolving program. This program is based upon the tenet that the acceptance of others must begin with the understanding of one's self. The curriculum forms a three-tiered model which fosters sensitivity to diversity, the acquisition of a knowledge base of global cultures, and the development of respect for diverse perspectives and the uniqueness of others. It is believed that only through an enhanced understanding of ourselves and others can peace be attained in our pluralistic and global society.

In the teacher education program where I am presently teaching (Bethany College), both formal and practical experiences are provided, when it comes to implementing effective teaching strategies to enable prospective teachers and teachers currently in the field to meet the needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

In order to prepare preservice/inservice teachers to work with students whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own, a strong multicultural component has been infused throughout their methodology courses. This component is designed to provide experiences that will heighten awareness and appreciation of diversity. These experiences include the enhancement of self-esteem, the reading of literature about other cultures, the participation in interactive seminars with guest speakers on multicultural issues, and the working with children from diverse

cultures in field-based assignments at public schools in which at least 25 percent of the students in the host classrooms are from cultures other than that of the preservice/inservice teacher's and have been identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP).

Short lectures which include graphic organizers, demonstrations, modeling, opportunities for "hands on" experiences, individual and cooperative presentations, assigned readings, small and large group discussions, and the keeping of reflective-dialogue journals are just some of the instructional strategies employed in the formal component of the methodology/ foundation courses that I teach in Bethany College's Teacher Education Program (TEP). These learning experiences are designed to promote active participation and to foster the verification, generalization, and application of newly acquired skills and concepts (Postman & Weingartner, 1969).

The informal component of the methodology/foundation courses includes weekly scheduled field experiences in surrounding elementary schools where the students in the teacher education program observe master teachers, interact with small groups of students during tutorial sessions, put up bulletin boards, correct papers, and record reflections of their classroom observations in dialogue journals.

Description of the Population:

Approximately 90 per cent of the students enrolled in the education program at Bethany College are females of Euro-American decent and are an average age of 28. Many are married, with families, and approximately one half have full or part time positions. All of these students are college graduates with degrees reflecting a variety of disciplines. Some have masters degrees and come from professional backgrounds other than teaching. They are typical of the majority of students enrolled in one of California's accredited fifth year teacher credential programs.

The Need for Multiculture Education:

Since it has been predicted that by the year 2000 approximately one-third of the school-age students in the United States will be people of color (Banks, 1989; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989), and nearly one half of our students will be of

color by the year 2020 (Banks, 1993), it is essential for every teacher education program to equip its preservice/inservice teachers to meet the needs of students from diverse cultures (Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1993). These needs include the acquisition of "knowledge, skills, and attitudes" necessary "to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world (Banks, 1993, p. 23).

According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), there are three major reasons why multicultural education is necessary. First, ethnic pluralism is a growing reality that is influencing our lives. Second, we all acquire knowledge and beliefs about ethnic and cultural groups, some of which may be erroneous, and third, some knowledge and beliefs may limit one's perspective and negatively impact opportunities made available to members of a particular ethnic or cultural group. Consequently, "it is essential that all members of our society develop multicultural literacy" or an understanding of "racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and their significance in U.S. society and throughout the world" (NCSS Task Force on Ethnic Studies Curriculum Guidelines, 1992, p. 275).

A Multicultural Perspective:

Since many school districts in California are looking for teachers who have been trained to work specifically with students from diverse backgrounds, whose primary language is one other than English, Bethany College prepares it teachers for the relatively new Cultural/Linguistic Academic Development (CLAD) California teaching credential (K-8 or Single Subject for secondary teachers). Gilliom (1993), however, believes that "the majority of preservice education programs do little to prepare new teachers with the knowledge or motivation to teach from a global perspective"(p. 40). He further contends that "change comes slowly and incrementally" and that the first step toward globalizing a curriculum, or making it attainable to every student, may begin with a single professor making changes in one course or in one university program (p. 41).

Responding to the need to prepare our future teachers to teach in culturally diverse classrooms, I have endeavored to infuse multicultural awareness and appreciation, along with Specially Designed Academic Instructional in English (SDAIE) strategies throughout all of the courses I teach.

In the reading/language arts methodology course I teach for preservice/inservice teachers, I begin infusing multicultural awareness/appreciation with a self esteem exercise (Sletter, 1993) during which I ask the students to design logos that represent them. I share mine, which is a humming bird, and explain why I identify with this symbol; then, I ask the students to do the same with theirs. Not only does this exercise allow everyone to feel validated, but it also provides me with valuable insight in regard to my students. At the same time, ground work is laid for a safe environment in which divergent opinions or perspectives are respected (Ryan & Cooper, 1992). It is in this manner that the appreciation of diversity is introduced.

Many teachers have limited knowledge about cultures that differ from theirs. This is believed to be particularly true about Euro-American teachers in regard to their knowledge of the African American, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic cultures (Bennett, Niggle, & Stage, 1989; Moultry, 1988). In order to better prepare our "monocultural [preservice] teacher[s] for the multicultural classroom" (Dana & Lynch-Brown, 1993, p. 46), in addition to the initial self-awareness exercise and the establishment of a safe environment, other learning experiences have been designed to heighten awareness and the understanding of diverse cultures. These learning experiences are in keeping with the contentions of Berman (1986) and Pellicano and Pellicano (1986) that ethnocentrism may be reduced by teaching students to see the world from the perspective of people of different cultures.

At Bethany College, the students in the teacher education program not only take two classes that address multicultural issues and teaching strategies for English as a Second Language (ESL) students (Peregoy & Boyle, 1993), but they must also take an educational foundations course which addresses bilingual education (Crawford, 1993). Then, in the reading/language arts course I teach, the preservice/inservice teachers prepare integrative units in which they must identify the use of SDAIE, metacognitive, and critical (higher level) thinking strategies that not only enhance the learning of English and the academic skills of ESL students, but they also provide all students equal access to the curricula with an equal opportunity to learn

Although the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) offers only one multiculture course (and this is an elective) on its Gulf Coast campuses, when I taught there I infused a multiculture component in all of my methodology courses believing, as Gilliom (1993) does, that even one professor can be a change agent and make a positive difference among the students with whom he or she comes in contact. In the social studies methodology course that I taught, I asked the students to read and react to two pieces of assigned multicultural literature and then address the following in a short reflective paper:

- Ethnic/cultural background of author
- Specific culture being addressed
- Author's purpose or message
- Author's biases
- Your previous conceptions of the culture being addressed
- As a result of your readings, biases you are discovering you possess or you previously possessed.
- New perceptions you are acquiring as a result of your readings
- In what way has your awareness, tolerance, appreciation, and/or respect toward the culture being discussed been enhanced?
- As a representative of a specific ethnic or cultural group, what are some of the perspectives that the author shares?
- What did you learn about the values, traditions, viewpoints or perspectives of the culture you were assigned that was previously unfamiliar to you?

Throughout the reading of the literary selections, the preservice teachers not only met in cooperative groups, which were formed to develop integrative thematic social studies units, but each of these cooperative groups also sent representatives to

various literary groups whose members met to discuss an assigned literary selection about a specific culture (e.g., African American, American Indian, Hispanic, and Asian American). The members in each literary group discussed their assigned selection in terms of the author's message and their previous misconceptions or recently acquired perceptions about the culture under discussion. Each group then chose a spokes person to report their reflections to the class as a whole.

The reflective-dialogue journals that the preservice teachers kept while reading their literary selections about cultures other than their own were not only used to facilitate their small and large group discussions, but they also assisted the students in writing reflective papers on the following:

- How has this assignment heightened your awareness, tolerance, appreciation, and respect of the diverse culture in which we live?

- How will this experience better prepare you to meet the needs of a culturally diverse school-age population?

The class discussions, journal entries, and reflective papers of the preservice teachers revealed an openness, on the part of these students, to replace negative misconceptions and misunderstandings with a heightened awareness and an appreciation of beliefs and practices that differ from theirs. Only once did a student express that although she had heightened her awareness about a particular culture, she would have to know more about that culture before she could really appreciate its contributions.

Hansen-Krening (1992) used novels by authors of different ethnic backgrounds, along with literary circles and response journals, to assist inservice teachers in examining their own cultural perspectives and those of others. Although this author felt that her efforts were a "modest" beginning in the appreciation of cultural pluralism, her students' responses revealed that they had found this exercise to be beneficial. Cox and Galda (1990) share the belief that multicultural literature

can effectively be used as a window on multicultural perspectives. LeSourd (1992) believes that cross-cultural learning experiences that require students to identify with others or other's perspectives may foster an increased understanding of the "unfamiliar" (p. 31), and McNergney (1994) maintains that learning about cultures that differ from our own helps to "make the familiar strange."

In addition to learning about other cultures through literature and group discussions, students were asked to form dyads and recall critical incidents in which they had witnessed prejudice or an unkind act directed toward someone due to a difference in gender, cultural affiliation, age, or socio-economic status (LeSourd, 1992; Thompson, 1995). Some of these incidents were discussed with the group as a whole. Finally, the class collectively discussed some of the benefits derived from other cultures as well as shared some of their fears at seeing our society become culturally more pluralistic and diverse. Schukar (1993) proposes that in order to participate in a democratic society, we must prepare our students to face conflicting, as well as multiple, perspectives and provide them with the knowledge and skills (e.g., inquiry and reflection) to resolve controversial issues. He further contends that controversy need not be viewed negatively but rather as a positive means of preparing thoughtful and participatory citizenry for a larger or global society. Although many of the preservice teachers I taught at the University of Southern Mississippi had voiced, through class discussions and journal entries, that they had been raised in prejudicial environments, the class consentiently requested that more multicultural learning experiences be provided in the future.

In addition to participating in experiences that were designed to heighten awareness and appreciation of people from cultures other than one's own, the prospective teachers in the social studies methodology course I taught at USM implemented the integrative thematic social studies units that they had develop in culturally diverse classroom near the university. These field experiences not only enabled the preservice teachers to engage elementary students in meaningful and enriching learning experiences, but they also provided the preservice teachers with opportunities to work with students from cultures other than their own, which Cross (1991) believes fosters the development of an informed appreciation of other cultures. (My personal

observations led me to believe that the preservice teachers do bond with the pupils with whom they work regardless of the students' cultural backgrounds.) Carter (1992) and Gay (1993) contend that field-based experiences of this nature are needed since they enable our future teachers to be more effective in meeting the needs of today's racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socially diverse students.

Whether one is a solitary professor infusing a multicultural perspective throughout her individual curricula or an instructor in a teacher education program with a major multicultural focus, I believe that my paramount responsibility as a "cultural broker" (Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983) or change agent (Gay, 1993, 1995) is to instill in preservice/inservice teachers the following, which I was privileged to express to Debbie Wood (1994), a journalist from The Mississippi Press:

> We as teachers must make a difference in the lives of children. We must reach every child, validate him, help him to grow up with self-esteem, [and] help him [to] feel worthy and loved or we as a nation will reap the consequences. (p. 1-B)

Conclusion:

Since the "United States is one of the most demographically diverse nations in the world" (Barrett, 1993), we must enable our future teachers to have a better understanding of other cultures so that they can provide an optimal education for all of their students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds (Pahnos & Butt, 1992). Furthermore, because we live in a culturally diverse society, in order for our students to be truly educated and feel at peace with those whose traditions and heritages differ from theirs, it is critical that our students not only develop an understanding and an appreciation of other cultures, but that they also possess skills that will enable them to function within diverse societies (Baker, 1983) whether at home or abroad. Only then will we be able to achieve unity with all mankind and live harmoniously in our culturally pluralistic and increasingly global society.

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